Marxism on this Side of the Iron Curtain

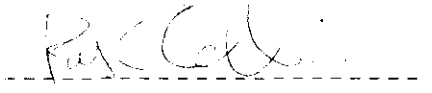
An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

By

Christian Bartholomew

Thesis Advisor:

Patrick Collier



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Thesis Abstract

Many shy away from Marxism, associating it only with the Soviet Union. This thesis attempts to highlight and briefly explain selections from the large body of Western Marxist theory in order to show the independence of Marxism from the Soviet influence and acquaint the reader with some of the significant topics examined by Western Marxists. It begins with a brief history of Marxism and socialism and moves on to an explanation of the fundamental concepts in Marxism. The thesis then covers the views of various Western Marxist theorists, including Adorno, Lukács, Benjamin, Gramsci, Althusser, and Zizek. It also includes discussions of theorists such as Sartre and Derrida, who, while influential in their own right, made attempts to integrate their theories with Marxism.

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Karl Marx begins *The Communist Manifesto*, stating, "A spectre is haunting Europe--the spectre of Communism." For many of us who grew up in the Western world, especially in the United States, Marx's description of communism as a haunting, ghostly presence could not ring more true. Always lurking around the corner or behind an invisible but nonetheless tangible Iron Curtain, communism was the mysterious and evil presence that all those of the free world were obliged to fear and hate. As a child, I grew up listening to frightening stories of communist oppression, extreme religious persecution, people unable to speak their mind, and people banished to camps in Siberia for doing so. In the minds of most Americans, communism was inseparably linked to the litany of atrocities committed by Soviet Russia and the terrifying, militant opposition to American freedom (and capitalism) posed by that nation. Then something happened. In a few short years the Soviet Union released its hold on the world and dissolved. The vast majority of Americans saw the failure of communist Russia as proof once and for all of the invalidity of the communist ideal. For them the specter had ceased to haunt and had started looking more and more like one of those innocuous spooks of Halloween.

Communism was not, however, swept away with the Soviet Union, nor was communist thought intrinsically bound to the failed Russian system in the first place. Socialist and communist ideas existed even before Marx and still exist after the fall of the Soviet Union. The Iron Curtain itself, that figurative embodiment of all that separated the free, Western world from the world of red communism, may have represented a serious political boundary, but the seeds of communist thought had been planted on either side of the curtain before it dropped. Marx, after all, was German, not Russian, and *The Communist Manifesto* was first published in England (Possony x). Marxist theory

has flourished on this side of the Iron Curtain, and it is upon the thinkers and ideas of this Western Marxist tradition that I will focus in this paper.

It is not my goal here to advocate or denounce any of the positions presented. Rather, my purpose is to inform, as I believe no matter what a person's stance towards Marxist thinking may be, it is a critical error to ignore the significant contributions of this field to Western thought. Before I proceed to examine Western Marxist theory, I will first briefly examine the historical contexts in which socialism and Marxism have developed and then take a look at some of the ground principles of Marxist thought.

I. History

Socialist ideas were born from the social changes that took place as a result of the Industrial Revolution. With the emergence of a new and large working class that manned the factories at the center of the industrial economy, came new forms of social injustice borne by the workers. In France, thinkers such as Henri de Saint-Simon recognized the oppressive conditions of the working class as early as the 1830's and proposed solutions such as the abolishment of private property. François-Marie-Charles Fourier envisioned a society of perfect communities, and Robert Owen, himself an English capitalist, railed against the evils of competition and supported workers' unions and utopian communities (Coser and Ryan). Karl Marx was but one of many voices that cried out against capitalism. In association with a secret London group called the Communist League, he produced *The Communist Manifesto* in 1848 (Possony vii), a book that laid out clearly the basic principles for the movement that would sprout up in his name. By 1864 dissident groups of all ilks met in London at a gathering known as the First International, an assembly which sought to unify the program of

groups fighting for workers' justice. The meeting was dominated by Marx (Coser and Ryan).

Marx's ideas continued to gain prominence throughout the late nineteenth century, but not without competition. Ferdinand Lassalle, another German figure in the labor movement, opposed Marx's contention that forthright revolution was necessary and supported instead a cooperative approach with the government. In less industrialized countries such as Spain and Italy, anarchism and syndicalism, a movement centered on governing through labor unions, often won out over Marxism as the radicalism of choice. The English labor movement, which was never as heavily influenced by Marx as its continental counterpart, saw a rise in Fabianism, which emphasized gradual change through pressure on the government. By the time of the Second International in 1889, a unified workers' movement seemed unlikely, as attendees reflected a growingly diverse set of agendas and opinions on the movement. World War I further damaged the labor cause by prompting an upswing in nationalism that detracted attention from the solidarity of international labor (Coser and Ryan). The war, however, would later turn out to grant communism its greatest boon by bending Russia to its breaking point.

In a troubled czarist Russia, Vladimir Ilich Ulyanov, otherwise known as Lenin, developed a strain of Marxism he believed applicable to the largely pre-industrial Russian economy. In 1902 he made his views known in a pamphlet entitled *What is to Be Done?*, and the following year he played a leading role in the conference of the Russian Social-Democratic Workers' Party, heading the Bolshevik faction of the conference. When czarist rule in Russia collapsed under the stress of World War I in February 1917, it took Lenin and his Bolsheviks only until October to overthrow the provisional Russian government and

create the first serious government founded on Marxist principles (Coser and Ryan)[1]. When the Third International was held in Moscow in 1919, the Russians asserted their control over the international movement, disassociating themselves from softer forms of socialism (Coser and Ryan). Russian communism would thus set out on its own rocky course.

While orthodox Marxism was never able to gain any lasting control in the governments of the rest of Europe as it had in Russia, Marxist groups continued to exist in the political arena and in the academy, associating with the Soviet regime in varying degrees. These groups developed diverse approaches toward the Marxist mission; within academia alone, there existed many Marxist camps that did not always get along. Marxist theory was a lively field in the West, which included thinkers such as György Lukács, Antonio Gramsci, Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, Louis Althusser, and Jean-Paul Sartre, all of whom would bring a Marxist flavor to numerous academic disciplines (and many of whom I will discuss in greater detail later).

The polarization of power between the United States and the Soviet Union after World War II had the result of the demonization in the United States of Marxism, communism, socialism, or any other movement that could be associated with the beliefs of our Cold War opponent. The fear of communism had its apogee in the figure of Joseph McCarthy, the senator from Wisconsin who in 1950 made the claim that over two hundred communists had infiltrated the State Department.

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[1] The Russian Revolution had great ramifications. The power struggle within the Communist Party was decided with the rise of Lenin and suppression of the rival Menshevik faction, which would reflect upon the entire course of Russian communism. In addition, the murder of the

McCarthy's campaign against suspected communists in the United States ended eventually with his 1954 censure by a U.S. Senate that had tired of his often completely unfounded accusations[2]. McCarthyism was only a small facet of the Cold War, but as it is not my purpose to dwell on this expansive topic, it serves as a good enough example of the fear and hostility toward Marxist ideas that were fostered in a Western world enveloped in the Cold War power struggle. Though the United States won the Cold War with Russia, a residual amount of hostility toward Marxist ideas in general can still be found in vociferous figures such as David Horowitz, a Marxist turned conservative, who strongly denounces traditional Marxism and the politics of the New Left of the sixties as generally destructive and inherently opposed to American values.

Though Western Europe shared in the Cold War victory with the United States, Europeans never exhibited the kind of antipathy toward communism as their American allies. European groups committed to the same kind of social transformation as Marx, but who eschewed Marx's insistence upon forceful methods and the later violence of revolutionary Russia, had begun forming very influential political parties in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These parties continued to develop throughout the Cold War, often calling themselves "Social Democrats." Social Democrats wished for a peaceful transition to socialism similar to that sought by the Fabians through cooperation with the government. Modifying Marxist orthodoxy by embracing democracy and private ownership, Social Democrats in Europe

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czar and his family did irreparable damage to the monarchy, practically insuring the impossibility of this institution's return to power.

[2] The validity of McCarthy's cause is once again a matter of contention, especially amongst neo-conservatives like David Horowitz and Ann

have successfully promoted the idea of the welfare state, a state responsible for the well-being of its citizens, and have striven to combine public economic planning with capitalist notions of competition (Coser and Ryan).

Socialist thought has undergone over one hundred fifty years of development, surviving the early Industrial Revolution, two world wars, and the failure of its greatest experiment, the Soviet Union. The ideas of its greatest theorist, Marx, have, likewise, survived history through continual reinterpretation. Let us move on to an examination of the most fundamental of those ideas.

II. Fundamental Concepts of Marxism

"The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles," states Marx in the first chapter of *The Communist Manifesto*. Specifically, the class struggle that exists in capitalist economies is between the bourgeoisie, the class of people who own the modes of production and employ others for wages, and the proletariat, those who labor under the bourgeoisie in order to survive (13). Both classes emerged as society turned to industrialism and left behind the feudal system, and both classes are representative of a growing split in society by which the remains of earlier classes, such as the aristocracy or peasants, are forced into one camp or the other by capitalism (15). The bourgeoisie are responsible for the establishment of the capitalist system with its unparalleled drive for progress and production, but Marx likens them to the sorcerer "who is no longer able to control the power of the nether world whom he has called up by his spells" (24).

Class struggle leads to a key facet of orthodox Marxism: economic

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Coulter, who claim that McCarthy's concerns were more reasonable than

determinism. According to Marx, the capitalist machine that the bourgeoisie have created is destined to fail. Capitalism and its never ceasing quest for new markets and expansion of production eventually lead to a crisis of over-production. In order to maintain themselves, the bourgeois have no other choice but to destroy the methods of production and start anew, always with grander aims than before (Marx 25). The proletariat, who are constantly exploited through this process and without whom the system cannot go on, will eventually get fed up with their oppression, organize, and revolt. Marx states of the bourgeoisie, "Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable" (38)[3].

Most people can look around their everyday lives and see a lot more than class struggle; religion, culture, entertainment, education--all of these things seem to float above the purely economic picture of the world painted by Marx. Marx explained the aspects of life that are ostensibly independent of economics in terms of a theory of base and superstructure. Moyra Haslet elucidates the concept of base, defining it as "the infrastructure or the mode of production which characterises the society" (18). Feudalism, for example, was the base of medieval society, and capitalism is the base of our society. The afore-mentioned apparently non-economic elements of society are parts of the superstructure. The base seems to take priority in Marx's theory (18-19), with the superstructure acting as a kind of natural outgrowth of it. However, the actual primacy of the base is debatable, because base and superstructural elements are dependent upon each other and mutually influential (21-22). The ability of the superstructure to act with

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traditionally acknowledged.

some separation from the base is known as its "relative autonomy."

An important part of the social superstructure is ideology, which has been described as a form of "false consciousness" which seeks to support the ruling classes by obfuscating the underclasses' view of reality (Haslet 51). In relation to Gramsci's concept of hegemony, ideology is described as "the ideas, beliefs, representations and practices which bind people together" (57). Ideology is a method of maintaining the current mode of production; it is the system that teaches those who live under capitalism to act in ways that encourage capitalism. In doing so, ideology also enables the indoctrinated to overlook discrepancies in the capitalist system, such as that between the capitalist promise of freedom of choice and the reality for many of having only oppressive, low wage forms of employment from which to choose (62). Louis Althusser elaborated upon this process of indoctrination and control, proposing a nuanced system of "Ideological State Apparatuses," a system by which ideology operates through the state, which will be discussed in detail later.

Ideology is not the only facet of capitalism that blinds men from the truth. In his book *Das Kapital*, Marx discusses what he calls "The Fetishism of Commodities," one of the major harmful effects of modern capitalism. Though the combined labor of individuals makes up a total societal labor, the individual laborers' isolation in the capitalist production system obscures this social quality of their labor. The social quality of their labor reveals itself only when commodities are exchanged. Social relations are eventually perceived in the commodities themselves, instead of amongst the laborers. This is what

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[3] Later discussions about Adorno and Althusser will cast doubt upon this kind of determinism, showing how intricate ideological systems can enable the prolonged subjugation of the proletariat.

Marx referred to as fetishism (217). Society is eventually ruled by its commodities, not realizing that they (the laborers) are the cause of the social relations that occur between these commodities (219). Marx believed that this relation between commodities and people did not exist in earlier forms of production like feudalism (221). He believed that fetishism need not occur, and he called for a production process that "is consciously regulated by them [men] in accordance with a settled plan" (223).

Marx's preoccupation with examining the workings of society's economic base can be explained by his advocacy of a way of thought known as dialectical materialism. Haslet says, "Most simply, we might think of materialism as the contention that everything which exists either is, or depends upon, matter or physicality, as distinguished from ideas" (24). In other words, the root cause of everything is physical in nature; ideas, no matter how influential they may be, always spring from physical circumstances. Marx's materialism is dialectical, because he did not view the world in terms of fixed, binary opposites; rather, he saw a continuous interplay of concepts, happenings, and things in the world, a world where everything influences everything else.

The theoretical groundwork laid by Marx has undergone the scrutiny of Marxists and non-Marxists alike; through the years, it has been denounced, embraced, and reinterpreted. Armed with a knowledge of the fundamentals of Marxism, we are now prepared to undertake an examination of the various theoretical concerns and permutations of Marxism specific to the Western world, which range from the analysis of artwork to the examination of language and represent the attempts of Marxism to adapt to almost a century's worth of world change.

IV. Western Marxist Theory

Artwork and Culture

Much of Western Marxist theory concerns artistic works and how they contribute to or are detrimental the Marxist project[4]. An important facet of Marxist artistic analysis is the belief that all works of art are entrenched in society and do not exist in a realm separate from it (Haslet 16). Therefore, analysis of art yields not just (or even primarily) an understanding of a phenomenon that takes place in an ivory tower for a privileged few who possess a highly refined sense of aesthetics, but a deeper understanding of the overall social conditions of the era in which the art was produced. Art is part of society's superstructure; more specifically, works of art are representative of society's ideology (Eagleton 5). As a part of ideology, artistic works play a definite role in encouraging social reform or reinforcing the status quo. However, deciding which qualities of a work make it proactive for the Marxist cause or harmful to this cause is not an easy task.

From early on, the realist genre gained favor amongst Marxists. Friedrich Engels, Marx's closest contemporary, advocated a realist literature that could reflect, though perhaps not directly, society's situation through "the truthful rendering of typical characters under typical circumstances" (qtd. in Haslet 87). Soviet propagandists also promoted what they dubbed as "socialist realism," a realism that sought to paint a picture of real life in a utopian socialist future, but socialist realism was met mostly with disdain by Western critics (87). The champion of realism in Western Marxist theory was György Lukács, a Hungarian theorist whose ideas would peek through the Iron Curtain to

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[4] My use of the phrase "artistic works" here is a matter of convenience. I am referring to creative cultural products that would normally fall

gain prominence in the dialogue of Western Marxists.

Lukács espoused a critical realism that, unlike the socialist realism promulgated by the Soviet authorities, did not discount the value of certain bourgeois artistic forms, such as the novel; rather, it was the realist novels of the nineteenth century that Lukács held in high regard as an appropriate tool of socialism (Haslet 88). The content of these novels stood in contrast to that of other contemporary movements like naturalism and modernism, which Lukács saw as decadent because of their tendency to portray humans as disconnected or without purpose in the world (89). While naturalism at first appears to be realistic, Lukács argues that it concentrates too much on the surface details of the world, a tendency that ultimately renders the genre unrealistic because it ignores the basic unity that exists in society (89-90). It is this basic societal unity that critical realism hopes to bring to light. Lukács saw historical realist novels as accomplishing this goal through their portrayal of typical people who are often caught between both sides of a conflict (91). The dialectics of life, that is, man's complex existence in a world where black and white decisions always blend into a shade of gray, and the true unity of society are thus shown through the content of the realist work of art.

Lukács' views were not universally adopted in Marxist circles. During the 1930's tensions between modernist and realist Marxist camps came to a head as figures like Bertold Brecht and Theodor Adorno set out to defend modernism as something other than the reflection of capitalist decadence Lukács claimed it to be (Haslet 94). Brecht, an East German experimental playwright, leveled criticisms at Lukács for

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under the label "art." I use this phrase without any real reference to

his preference of the classical realist novel and wondered how Marxism was supposed to progress into the future using the artistic genres of the past (94). In his own work, Brecht sought to give his audience an experience that would disrupt their view of the world. He believed that bourgeois theatre attempts to trick the audience into believing that the stage show is real and thereby promotes the ideological stance that the world is fixed and unchangeable (Eagleton 64). Brecht attempted to make his works emphasize the productive process, loading them with contradictions, discontinuities, and interruptions in the hope that the audience would realize the open-ended possibilities of the artwork and their own possibility to change a world, which like his art, is not fixed (65).

Theodor Adorno, like Brecht, advocated modernist artworks largely on the merit of their form rather than their content (Haslet 100). In contrast to Lukács, whose realism focused primarily on a work's content, Brecht demonstrated how crucial form was to art by performing traditional plays by Shakespeare, Goethe, and others using his radical methods (100, 97). Adorno drew upon his musical background, pointing out that the only way to make music reflect society was through its form (99). He believed that modernist music, such as that created by Schoenberg, alienated or defamiliarized its audience from their surroundings, and through this alienation, the meaninglessness of modern society shows itself (100). Other modernist forms of art, like surrealism in the visual arts, worked with form toward the same ends. For Adorno, form was what came between social reality and the artist. Artworks cannot merely reflect reality; they represent it at a distance mandated by the creative process. This distance makes art a useful

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the quality or authenticity of the work as "art."

tool for social criticism (100). By ignoring considerations of form, Adorno held, Lukács' realist novels fall into the trap of trying to portray reality directly, not realizing that this is impossible through the work's content alone (101).

Theodor Adorno's advocacy of modernist art stood not only in opposition to Lukács' realism; it was also his answer to a modern epidemic he and Max Horkheimer defined in their essay "The Culture Industry," which appeared in their book *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Adorno's world differed greatly from that of Marx, and the most obvious difference was a technological one. In *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx describes machines as they relate to the laborer and his status in the process of production. One hundred years later, machines not only played a role in production, but were an integral part of culture and entertainment as well. Adorno and Horkheimer refuted the argument that mass-produced entertainment evolves from a consumer demand, pointing to the economic gain to be made by those in charge of the production of such entertainment (121). Moreover, they said that those who run the culture industry are linked to and dependant upon other capitalists so much that one cannot really differentiate between the interests of exploitive capitalist entertainers and capitalist bankers or other capitalist producers of more tangible products (122-3).

Adorno and Horkheimer believed the control of the modern bourgeoisie to be one of the mind, a kind of mass brainwashing; "The need which might resist central control has already been suppressed by the control of the individual consciousness" (121). The public likes the culture industry (122), and their desire for it furthers their alienation from themselves (121). The power of the consumer to judge and enjoy art on his own terms is removed by rigid pre-classification and standardization techniques that ensure each product of the culture

industry elicits a pre-determined response (125). Art is thus eviscerated and the consumer is controlled. The products of the culture industry mimic reality; after a while, the consumer can no longer distinguish the real from the projection of the real imposed upon him by the industry (126). The culture industry keeps the consumer coming back for more by never fulfilling the promises its products give (139-40).

Adorno and Horkheimer's theory of the culture industry necessitates a reexamination of the concepts of base and superstructure. "Cultural entities typical of the style of the culture industry are no longer *also* commodities," says Adorno, "they are commodities through and through" (qtd. in Huyssen 21). In a system where culture itself is manipulated as a commodity, the distinction between a society's economic base and its superstructure is blurred or even eliminated. The evolution of the sales jingle is a perfect example of the commodification of culture. Once identifiable as pieces of advertisements (mainly because of their well-crafted and memorable inanity), sales jingles are now indistinguishable from the other pop music on the radio, and television advertising has integrated music videos by popular artists such as Brittany Spears seamlessly into the commercial lineup.

Walter Benjamin, a member of Adorno and Horkheimer's intellectual circle known as the Frankfurt School, butted heads with Adorno in the 1930's over his conclusions in "The Culture Industry." While Adorno viewed technology as a means by which the culture industry could exert its control over society and ensure the predominance of capitalism, Benjamin looked upon technological innovation as potentially liberating. In his essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Benjamin concentrates on art's "aura," that quality that

has historically legitimized art and that derived from art's social function in a given society (Wolin 187). Imbued with an aura, the artwork is something unique. From the renaissance onward, artwork has established its autonomy from the social institutions and functions that previously lent it its aura, and in the twentieth century, the advent of photography and mechanical reproduction of artworks has virtually destroyed the previous uniqueness of the artwork and art's aura altogether. It is in the destruction of art's aura that Benjamin saw the possibility of liberation. An artwork divested of aura is no longer viewed as a cult object; rather, the viewer's attention can now focus upon "*the point of intersection between the work and the onlooker*" (188). This new art is perfectly suited for political functioning, and Benjamin saw the greatest possibilities for this political functioning in the medium of film (189). Influenced by Brecht, he believed that film too could shock and alienate audiences into awareness and contemplation (190).

The attention given by Adorno, Horkheimer, and Benjamin to technology and mass production and their effects on cultural products and society would eventually play a role in the rise of a whole new field of study: cultural studies. Cultural studies is a discipline that emerged in Britain in the 1950's and undertook the examination of modern phenomena that traditional Marxism was ill-equipped to understand such as the influence of radio, film, and television (Haslet 127). The scope of cultural studies is immense, ranging from the study of youth subcultures to newspapers to popular novels to race relations (127). The discipline's serious study of a wide range of popular forms has widened possible definitions of literature, loosened adherence to the literary canon, and blurred the line between "high" and "low" cultural forms (152-3). The relationship between cultural studies and

Marxism is complex; the discipline is both informed by Marxism and critical of it (128). However, the existence of cultural studies has directly affected many Marxists, causing them to examine more closely the ideological inclinations and emancipatory possibilities contained within popular works (154).

Ideology and Hegemony

Adorno, Horkheimer, and Benjamin sought to examine the particular role of cultural products and the relationship of these products to the Marxist cause. While their work was broad in scope, most of it fell squarely within the bounds of examining what were assumed to be ideological products. Louis Althusser, a French Marxist theorist who wrote more than thirty years after Adorno and Horkheimer's examination of the culture industry, went beyond the bounds of examining the products of ideology and undertook an examination of ideology itself and its subtle and not-so-subtle methods of social control in his essay "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses."

Althusser identifies two means of control used by the state and its ruling classes, the first of which is the "State apparatus," which includes the police, courts, prisons, army, and government. He sees this apparatus as nothing other than a "'machine' of repression" designed to allow the bourgeoisie to exploit the underclasses (131). The State apparatus is linked to what would traditionally be called the state, but Althusser points to the continued existence of parts of the former State apparatus after the Russian revolution as evidence that the state and the State apparatus are actually two separate entities (134). He further distinguishes between "State power" and the State apparatus, identifying State power as the object of the class struggle. After State power has been gained by the proletariat, the bourgeois State apparatus can be replaced with a non-repressive proletariat State

apparatus (135).

Althusser's theoretical step forward comes with his postulation of the second form of state control: the ideological State apparatuses (henceforth ISA's). Schools, which Althusser considers the dominant ISA, and other ISA's such as religious groups, families, political groups, trade unions, and communications and cultural outlets work to ingrain capitalist-friendly values in people while providing the diversely skilled labor power that capitalism demands (127, 136-8, 142). Schools do this by teaching students not only necessary technical skills but also by differentiating students according to their future roles in the productive system (127). In this way, ISA's, which operate through ideology and not force, are the bodies through which the relations of production are reproduced—a goal they accomplish with the help of the Repressive State apparatus (Althusser's name for the previously discussed, forceful method of state control) (141). Althusser says:

> In other words, the school (but also other state institutions like the Church, or other apparatuses like the Army) teaches 'know-how', but in forms which insure *subjection to the ruling ideology* or the mastery of its 'practice'. (128)

Identifying the role of ISA's, which largely make up the economic superstructure, also helps to clarify the enigmatic relations between base and superstructure by identifying the role of the superstructure as that of reproducing the necessary conditions for the maintenance of the base (131). To use a military example, if society were an army, the base would be everything that directly fulfills the needs of fighting (tanks, guns, etc…). The superstructure would include uniforms, customs and courtesies (standing at attention, saying "yes, sir"), and other (mainly cultural) elements of military life that have

been developed to ensure that soldiers can adequately perform their fighting (base) role. Without these elements, there could still be a fighting force, but it would not be an army. Significantly, it is these elements of membership (subjugation) that are the first to be instilled in the recruit, because they are crucial to the reproduction/continuation of the military way of life.

ISA's are the tools of ideology. Ideology itself serves to create fictitious representations of the relationships of production (155). In other words, ideology seeks to make the janitor believe himself to be a "sanitation engineer" or the "valued employees" of a fast-food restaurant to think of themselves as something other than underpaid, disposable labor. Or in a broader sense, ideology tries to make people believe that slaving to make someone else rich has something to do with making a positive contribution to society. Althusser clearly explains the way in which ideology operates, saying:

> All ideology represents in its necessarily imaginary distortion not the existing relations of production (and the other relations that derive from them), but above all the (imaginary) relationship of individuals to the relations of production and the relations that derive from them. What is represented in ideology is therefore not the system of the real relations which govern the existence of individuals, but the imaginary relation of those individuals to the real relations in which they live. (155)

In order to be effective, these imaginary relations necessarily differ throughout the course of time and in varying societies, but the Marxist attack on ideology is not focused solely on the operations of any particular ideology or its methods throughout history. Althusser's discussion follows the premise that ideology in general has no history.

Individual ideologies do have histories, but if Marx's definition of history as the history of class struggle holds true, ideology in general has functioned throughout history in more or less the same way by telling stories that attempt to cloak the relations of production in some kind of framework that makes them seem only natural (150-2). For example, under the feudal system in the Middle Ages, the relations of production were justified on grounds of the divine right of kings or The Great Chain of Being (everything has its divine place). In the antebellum South, the relations of production may have been justified with claims that African-Americans were not human. The stories change, but ideology functions all the same.

Speaking in terms of imaginary relationships gives the impression that ideology exists only in the realm of ideas. However, Althusser identifies ideology as material in the sense that the ideas of a man are expressed through his actions. These actions of individuals, when taken collectively in a society, become rituals that have a definite material existence and are ultimately the result of a material ideological apparatus (158). To go back to the example of the Middle Ages, the predominance of a church-based ideology led to the building of many churches, packed with religious iconography. The churches and icons reinforced the ideology of the church, causing more churches and further streams of people who frequented them (physical bodies in seats). Ideology, then, exists through its material practice.

As ideology gains its material existence through the concrete actions of men, men, as the facilitators of ideology, must in some way be willingly compelled to act on behalf of ideology or, in other words, to subject themselves to ideology. Althusser posits that ideology "recruits" or hails individuals, and these individuals, recognizing that it is they who are being hailed, respond, thus becoming subjects

of ideology (163). Everyone, by default, responds, falls into ideology, and becomes the locus for its practice. For example, when a man views a television commercial, he does not need to stop and think, "Is this commercial addressed to me?" He simply knows that the commercial is calling out to him, and by accepting or rejecting its message, he has already acknowledged the call and placed himself within the context of the world in which that call was made. In doing so, he has subjected himself to the ideology conveyed through the commercial. Ideology's unavoidable presence is explained when Althusser says, "The existence of ideology and the hailing or interpellation of individuals as subjects are one and the same thing," (163).

Antonio Gramsci, an Italian political activist imprisoned by the fascists in the 1930's, came to similar conclusions as Althusser about the functioning of capitalist society. In a series of notebooks written while he was in prison, Gramsci elaborated on the concept of hegemony, the name he gave to the process of ideological control exercised by classes in the struggle for social dominance. Like Althusser, Gramsci divided society into two segments. The first of these is known as "political society" or "the State," which includes bodies of the government that act through "direct domination," such as the judicial system, and which roughly correspond to Althusser's Repressive State apparatus (Gramsci, "The Formation" 12). The second segment is "civil society" or "private" society, which is made up of non-governmental bodies that serve to ensure the "spontaneous consent" of the masses to their state of domination (12). Civil society amounts to a "hegemony of a social group over the entire national society exercised through the so-called private organizations, like the Church, the trade unions, the schools, etc" (Gramsci, "The Formation" 12, Hoare and Smith 56).

While the role of Gramsci's civil society is akin to that of Althusser's ideological State apparatuses, the hegemony exercised through civil society is not as confined of a concept as the force of ideology used by Althusser's ISA's. Gramsci often uses the terms "leadership" and "hegemony" in ways that seem synonymous, connecting them both with the direction of a society intellectually, morally, and politically (Hoare and Smith 57-9). He directly equates the two terms when he compares "domination" without "leadership" to "dictatorship without hegemony" ("The Function" 106). Furthermore, he says that hegemony must take into account the good of the masses ("Some Theoretical" 161). If the masses become estranged from their political leadership because the ruling classes have failed to meet their demands, a "crisis of authority" could ensue in which the state and existing hegemony is put into peril (Gramsci, "Observations" 210). Whereas the control exerted by Althusser's ISA's seems almost absolute, Gramsci's hegemonic control is perhaps closer to that of a lion tamer who though he exploits his animal for personal gain, may not mistreat it too much without himself being eaten.

> In describing the operation of hegemony, Gramsci states:
>
> The 'normal' exercise of hegemony [. . .] is characterized by the combination of force and consent, which balance each other reciprocally, without force predominating excessively over consent. Indeed, the attempt is always made to ensure that force will appear to be based on the consent of the majority, expressed by the so-called organs of public opinion-- newspapers and associations-- which, therefore, in certain situations, are artificially multiplied. (qtd. in Hoare and Smith 80)

Though Gramsci differentiates the practice of hegemony from the wielding of state power by emphasizing that it is necessary for a class

to establish a political hegemony before it gains power (for a class to have earned a role as a political leader?)(Hoare and Smith 57), the previous passage implies the close relationship of the hegemonic forces of civil society, which rely on consent, and the violent means of the state. And while Gramsci identifies the "apparatus of the political and cultural hegemony of the ruling classes" as "private initiatives and activities," i.e. civil society, which is distinctly separate from the government ("The State" 258), his definition of the state itself is bound with the concept of hegemony, which shows in his statement that the "State = political society + civil society, in other words hegemony protected by the armour of coercion" (263).

In the final analysis, though hegemony can be viewed as a form of leadership that necessarily extends throughout the structures of private and political society to build a coherent and functioning state, the practice of capitalist hegemony is in no way a benevolent leadership; rather, hegemony, like ideology, serves as a form of manipulation that predicates the existence of a privileged class and a class of followers.

Jean-Paul Sartre

The theorists heretofore examined, though they possess often diverging views and cover grounds that may have been foreign to Marxism in its original conception, have all held in common a foundation of beliefs at least loosely based upon the original thoughts of Marx himself. Jean-Paul Sartre is a prime example of the expansive influence of Marxist thought on intellectuals whose primary work was not within Marxism.

Sartre gained prominence as an intellectual in troubled times. In the aftermath of the First World War and throughout the turmoil of the second, Sartre built an existentialist philosophy that drew from

Husserl and Heidigger's already existing work in phenomenology and that emphasized despair, decision, and dread, ever-present facets of life for the people of a violent and confused world (Kaufmann 40-41). His philosophy emphasized the individual's freedom and responsibility to determine his fate and his life's meaning in an absurd world (47). While Sartre identified with the Marxist cause and worked to show his existentialist philosophy compatible with Marxism, his rejection and reinterpretation of many basic Marxist beliefs leads some to question how Marxist his personal brand of Marxism really was.

Discussing Marxism and existentialism, Sartre states, ". . . I consider Marxism the one philosophy of our time which we cannot go beyond" (Sartre 369). He clarifies this statement when he says, "A so-called 'going beyond' Marxism will be at worst only a return to pre-Marxism; at best, only the rediscovery of a thought already contained in the philosophy which one believes he has gone beyond. . . ." (370). Sartre's seeming reverence to Marxism is deceptive (that is, if one views Marxism as something anywhere near to being the thing that I have been discussing).

Sartre acknowledged Marx's indictment of capitalism as truthful, and he believed in the Marxist goal of a classless society (Lawler 15, 20); however, his similarity with most other Marxist thinkers ends there. Whereas traditional Marxists see Marxist analysis as a scientific project, Sartre considered the idea of scientific knowledge dehumanizing and stood in opposition to forms of dialectical and analytical reasoning. He believed that scientific thinking caused the Marxist to lose sight of man's freedom, because scientific thinking necessitates the examination of humans as more or less passive objects and not as individuals with the capacity to shape themselves. Similarly, scientific thinking causes Marxists to deal too much with

social categories instead of individuals (54). In addition, he found that the objectivity supposedly gained from Marxism's scientific position is fictitious, because it stems from the assumption that the laws that govern humans are somehow rooted in the immutable ways of nature. He did not believe that the laws governing economics necessarily extended to the governance of human thought (15).

Sartre saw existentialism as an appropriate substitute for the scientific stance at the root of Marxism (Lawler 85); he even believed that Marx's original stance (before it underwent numerous false interpretations) was one that rooted the Marxist project in the practices of the individual and was existential in nature (3). Sartre stated that "the comprehension of existence is ... the human foundation of Marxist anthropology" (qtd. in Lawler 3).

Choice, as the keystone of Sartre's existentialist theory, was central to his Marxism. In a world where everything outside of the individual is futile and the individual is driven to look only within himself for answers, man is left to create his own meaning in life; he is left only with choice (Lawler 88, 10, 14). Believing in man's fundamental ability to choose, Sartre denounced the theory that man is mainly a product of his economic conditions (10, 19). He proposed that Marxists confuse consequences and causes when they attribute man's plight to a bad economic situation; the bad economics of capitalism was created as a result of the inner alienation of man, an alienation that man brings upon himself (17). None of this is to say that man is not influenced or formed by his environment; Sartre believed simply that man lets himself be influenced (16, 18).

If the problems Marxism seeks to redress are actually caused by man's self-alienation, whence comes this alienation? Man exists in the presence of other men. Knowing this, Sartre claimed, the individual

fails to recognize himself as a separate historical agent and begins to see all of his individual actions with regard to the presence of others (history always seems to be made by someone else, right?)(Lawler 19-20). When man sees himself not as an acting individual, but only as one of many (each of whom also sees himself as one of many), he becomes an abstraction and is thus self-alienated (131). Sartre believed that Marxism, with its goal of equalizing men, helps destroy the differentiations (social classes, economic disparities, etc...) that make men feel they exist in a world occupied by "others." When all men are finally equal and unified in the same cause, they will all share the same historical outlook, thus eliminating the view that history is in the hands of others and, with it, self-alienation (20).

Jacques Derrida

Just as Sartre's existentialism was the "it" philosophy of the mid-twentieth century, Jacques Derrida's theories about what he calls "deconstruction" have become focal points of contemporary theory. Like Sartre, Derrida hails from France, and also like Sartre, Derrida has attempted to integrate his thought with Marxism, the validity of these attempts being a matter of much contention.

Derrida's deconstruction concerns itself primarily with the shattering of the binary opposites that appear in language (good/bad, beautiful/ugly, and so forth) that play an intrinsic role in how we construct meaning in the world (Ryan 9). In each binary opposition, Derrida sees a primary term and a secondary term, the secondary being largely defined as the negation of the primary and always taking an ostensibly lesser role in the pair (the implication being, in many cases, that the primary could exist without the secondary). What is bad but the absence of good? While these binary pairs provide a convenient way to paint a picture of the world, he argues that, in

fact, they are illusions. Derrida points out that both terms in a binary pair supplement each other while calling attention to their differences; neither side of any pair can exist alone. Considering that these binary pairs do not exist in a vacuum, but in a larger world composed of pairs upon pairs that shape themselves into intricate hierarchies, the dissolution of the binary pair as a foundation for meaning results in the smearing of clearly defined hierarchies into a vast amalgamation of things whose meaning is only to be found in the interplay of difference amongst them (10). The radical nature of deconstruction is clear; present conceptions of the world cannot exist with the foundations of a system of meaning ripped from under them. But what does this have to do with Marx?

Marxism is a formal system, a highly elaborate one at that, and like other formal systems, it builds up a network theories, ideas, and explanations from certain foundational principles, such as dialectical materialism and class struggle. Derrida eschews formal systems, claiming that they are always incomplete. No matter how elaborate a system may be, there will always remain elements of the system that cannot be explained from within the system yet are necessary to it. To validate these elements, transcendence of the system is required (Ryan 17). If no appeal to transcendence is made at some point, latent contradictions in the system will appear as it is developed. Derrida seeks to bring out these contradictions in order to show, as with binary oppositions, that no absolutes exist from which to derive hierarchies of meaning (18). This way of thinking prevents Derrida from embracing traditional Marxism and its supposed scientific foundations and leads him to espouse a kind of open Marxism, an ever-flexible system moving throughout history (21).

Because Derrida rejects most of the formal elements of Marxism,

he is left speaking of the (or a) spirit of Marx which still haunts a largely post-communist world. The spirit of Marxism to which Derrida refers is tied most closely with the critical project of Marxism. Deconstruction works within this spirit of Marxism to help identify and undermine harmful products of capitalism like hegemony, which under the scrutiny of the hierarchy-busting deconstructive method is shown as a dangerous false construct (Harris).

One of the key elements of Derrida's Marxism, something to which the spirit of Marxism has awakened us (Lilla, sec. 5), is a kind of messianism, that, unlike religious and other forms of messianism, does not end in utopia (Bedggood, par. 46). Derrida's messianism has more to do with waiting for a (not) coming salvation than any coming salvation itself (Phillips). Marxism, he claims, despite the practical failures of those who have tried to implement it, has given mankind a promisary vision of the future that is not religious, mythical, or national. This unique vision has changed history and made us all, in a way, heirs to Marx (Lilla, sec. 5). The one concept that lies at the end of the vision given to us by Marx is justice, which is somehow unreachable in nature or through reason, making it impervious to the attacks of deconstruction. Derrida sees deconstruction as a way toward this intangible messianic justice that will never, in fact, be reached (sec. 4). It seems that it is the good will of a group of pilgrims traveling to a mythic promised land that Derrida wishes to instill in mankind; Marx played the role of myth-maker[5].

Slajov Zizek

Whereas Sartre and Derrida made arguably awkward attempts to

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[5] Derrida's views are far too complex to even begin to summarize here. Refer to his work *Spectres of Marx* for a more detailed account of his beliefs.

embrace Marx through their own theories, Slavoj Zizek, a Slovenian philosopher and psychoanalyst, approaches Marxism by supplementing the work of another psychoanalytic theorist, Jacques Lacan. Zizek, like Derrida, takes into account the linguistic element that lies at the core of the way meaning is constructed. However, he rejects Derrida's deconstructive method and pushes the examination of language into the realm of psychology in an attempt to avoid Derrida's oblique and weak approach toward Marxism through vague messianic notions. The result is a radical interpretation of ideology.

Zizek views the world in terms of the Symbolic and the Real. The collected system of symbols that we use to explain the world, such as languages and pictorial representations, make up the Symbolic. Humans always see the world in terms of the Symbolic, but the actual world, the Real, is not symbolic. This means that we constantly strive to clarify what is real through symbolic representations that do not, indeed cannot, perfectly parallel what really exists or goes on in the world. The Symbolic presents itself as reality, because it tries to closely reflect the structure of the Real. Since the Symbolic itself appears to be reality, it denies the existence of the Real (Wright and Wright 3). Zizek rejects Derrida's deconstructive analysis, because it rightly identifies contradictions in the Symbolic but makes the mistake of seeing the Symbolic as the Real--which leads to Derrida's inability to make many firm assertions.

Zizek's system of the Real and the Symbolic creates a unique niche for ideology. Because humans have bodies that exist in the Real and minds that leave us to dwell as subjects in the Symbolic, we are left with an inner void where the Symbolic fails to fully coordinate with the Real. We seek something that will fill the void, and we find ideology (Wright and Wright 3). Ideology attempts to console its

subjects with assertions that there is no inner void; it paints reality as "always-already symbolized" (54). Language, which tries to find a description for everything, is fully ideological (53). If ideology is to properly function, it and the function it performs must remain clandestine (54).

The discrepancy between the Real and the Symbolic is also responsible for the perception of class struggle, claims Zizek. Social reality, which exists in the Symbolic, seeks to be unified and consistent; however, the flaws of the Symbolic render complete unity and consistency impossible (Wright and Wright 54). Zizek says:

> The consequent thinking-out of this concept compels us to admit that there is no class struggle 'in reality': 'class struggle' designates the very antagonism that prevents the objective (social) reality from constituting itself as a self-enclosed whole. (74)

Attempts at creating a complete social reality lead to a vicious circle. Antagonisms between the Real and the Symbolic cause social antagonisms, which, in turn, result in new symbolizations. Since symbolizations are incapable of resolving the social antagonisms in the first place (and are indeed the cause of them), the new symbolizations simply create more antagonisms (Wright and Wright 54). Isn't it nice that ideology can step in to make us oblivious of all of this?

Paradoxically, the troublesome conjunction of the Real and the Symbolic is a source of freedom. The person who becomes separated from ideology becomes free. The break from ideology is not easy, as ideology alleviates the frightening responsibilities of freedom. This freedom consists of the ability to redefine the Symbolic as the individual sees fit. Freedom and ideology dwell in the same void. Zizek contends that only a psychoanalytic turn to the Marxist view of

ideology reveals this truth (Wright and Wright 54-55).

V. Conclusion

Whether Derrida's unorthodox views on Marxism are tenable or not, he had one thing right. There is a spirit of Marx that still lives on, in more ways than one. In the general sense, Marx, having now been stripped of his threatening political connotations, lives on as a pop icon. Just the other day, walking through the halls of one of the buildings at Ball State, I passed a display window designed by the Philosophy Department, and there was Marx, mingling with pictures of other philosophic luminaries like Jeremy Bentham, Simone de Beauvoir, and fellow dissident Noam Chomsky. Each of the philosophers in the display had their own witty caption. Marx's ran something like, "Most likely to inspire revolution." While one could say that Marx's inclusion in the company of well-known philosophers undermines his radicalism and proves that his thought has become stale and academic and has had its day, his inclusion in this crowd also shows an unashamed recognition that Marx has greatly influenced the thinking of the world. Perhaps, this recognition will pave the way for the broadening of the study of Marx, unprejudiced by the titanic Cold War ideological battles for the minds and hearts of men. At the very least, moving Marx from the status of reviled heretic to respectable thinker in the public eye has allowed openly Marxist bands like Rage Against the Machine to make some decent music without fear of extreme censure.

Then again, what might Adorno think of Rage Against the Machine? Or Benjamin, for that matter? Even bands that call out for revolution are distributed via the same corporate apparatuses as Brittany Spears; does their message have any chance of compensating for this? In an age when radio and television stations, newspapers and magazines, and even

the signs on the side of the road often have the same owners, the critical project of Marxism has an ever-increasing relevance. Can we trust the artistic integrity of music performed in an arena named after a cellular phone company? How authentic are gritty rock bands that cry bloody murder when people find a way to enjoy their music without paying exorbitant prices for it? The Marxist approach seems to be the only analytic model that has developed to deal with a cultural sphere increasingly permeated with economic influences and outright controls.

The questionable practices of cultural production in the Western world are only a small part of the malady of modern times. Marx's outlook was broad and international, and in the wake of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, a reexamination of Marxist theory could again be prudent. Desperate, angry people, mostly from Third World nations, feel driven to attack the United States and other industrialized nations. Many Americans cannot help but wonder, "What did we do to them?" The answer to this question could, at least in part, lie in the practices of advanced capitalism. Seeking the cheapest and most efficient ways to produce goods, corporations have expanded across the globe, hurdling over national boundaries to exploit human and natural resources in places where unscrupulous governments impose no controls over the means or methods of production. Unwittingly, Americans reap the benefits (or is it unwittingly? Do most Americans really care?). In the jealous eyes of Third World peoples who see American influence everywhere but whose lot in life never seems to improve, perhaps, Marx's class struggle has taken on international proportions. The problem is only exacerbated when the material desperation of the people is exploited by radical religious ideologues to further their own power or fuel their vendettas against secularism.

If class struggle really has taken on international proportions, then foreign cries of American hegemony may not be far off the mark. In the name of freedom and democracy, America has recently overturned two Third World governments. While the debate over the level of threat posed to America by Afghanistan and Iraq is positively explosive, there seems to be little debate about what America would like to see in the new governments that form in these fallen states. Democracy is the only acceptable option, and in the eyes of most Americans, democracy is intrinsically bound with capitalism. Granted, democratic capitalism is a huge step forward from the barbaric forms of government that did exist in these countries, but is there any doubt that America would take further action if these states decided in favor of radically socialistic governments or decided to reflect the religious sentiments of the people by establishing Islamic states? For better or worse, the spread of American ideology is a clear-cut goal in post-war Iraq and Afghanistan.

Marxist theory will not provide the answers to every problem in the modern world. However, neither will any other theory, including free-market theories. At the very least, Marxism has provided another viewpoint to the Western world. It has given us a tool for the critique of capitalism, and the critical spirit that has sprouted from Marxism has acted as an impetus to reform (or revolt). The Marxist theory that has developed on this side of the Iron Curtain still contains much possibility for progress, either through its critique or continuation. Unorthodox interpretations of Marxism like those of Sartre, Derrida, and Zizek show the versatility of Marxist theory and the value of the constituent theories of Marxism as they prove themselves fruitful building blocks for theoretical ventures in numerous fields. Even if it is no panacea for the world's woes,

Marxism has a role to play in a free and open modern society, whose greatness and potential for greatness hangs in large part upon the ability to find and harness the best from all modes of thought without prejudice.

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